

# *Sketch*

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## Just About

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# Just About

"C'MON," they had said. "Put the gloves on with Arney, Jimmy. What's the matter? You chicken?" And he had put on the gloves. And he had been beaten. Beaten by a boy only six years old, two years younger than he. He had gone home with a bloody nose and dirty shirt; and his mommy had washed him up, and sympathized. And he had said to himself, "I'll show 'em! I'll win next time."

But Jimmy never did win —

He had been eleven, then in sixth grade. Oh, yes! A bright boy, "intelligent beyond his years." Good grades, good paper boy, good parents, good background.

"And what are you going to be when you grow up, Jimmy?"

"A doctor, I guess," he'd reply.

They held the county spelling contest that year. "Jimmy will win," they had said. And Jimmy had spelled "occasionally" correctly, and "appendicitis", and "chasm". Why, he had even corrected the teacher's pronunciation of "chasm". But then there had been just the girl and himself left. And he had forgotten to capitalize "Connecticut". And he had been beaten. So he had gone home and locked himself in his room that night, and cried himself to sleep. But everybody had said, "Well, you spelled it right, anyway. And that's what really counts." But he had said to himself, "A lousy capital. But next year I'll win!" And the next year, he didn't even make it to the county finals.

Jimmy got to be fourteen. He was a freshman in high school now. "Try out for football," the people had said. Jimmy went out for football. "Hit'm hard. Show'em you're as tough as they are." And he had "hit'm hard."

He had hit one of them so hard that he'd broken his collarbone. So Jimmy had received a letter for being "a good boy. The only boy on the squad who got a major injury in the second week of practice." And everyone had laughed at the coach's little joke. Everyone at the Athletic Banquet. Jimmy had said to himself, "Wait till basketball season!"

And basketball season came and went, and the next year came and went, and he had been the "best supporting actor in the Junior Play". Best *supporting* actor. He had tried out for the *lead*. "Your voice is not quite fully developed," the drama coach had said.

"What will you take in college?" his friends had asked him.

"Engineering, I guess," he had replied.

For Jimmy was good in math, and mechanical drawing, and science. The teachers and parents said so.

The glorious senior year was upon Jimmy! At last, a Senior! One Who Walks the Corridors in Splendor! One whom the old Alma Mater would never be the same without.

The senior class had put out the school paper. And Jimmy? Jimmy had been assistant to the Art Editor. "You don't have the head that goes with the main job," the sponsor had said. Jimmy had become angry later, and had spent the next Saturday down at the river. But he had caught only two fish and they were both under the size limit.

"Dammit!" he had said.

So he had gone back home, and to church the next morning, where he had sung second baritone in the choir.

Jimmy went to college the next year. But he hadn't liked engineering. "Get into something else," his sponsor had said. "Get out of engineering. You can't get good grades in something you don't like." So Jimmy had taken aptitude tests, and interest tests, and personality tests; and the psychologist had said, "You're about average, James." So Jimmy had taken a Liberal Arts course. But he had been quite unhappy. And he spent much time thinking, and reading.

"How long has it been going on?" he had wondered.

Arney Webb beat me up —

Jerry Filger did, too —  
Gene Murphy —  
Larry Read bluffed me out —  
I've never won anything at poker or anything —  
Can't drink as much beer as anyone else —  
Can't eat as much pizza —  
Can't do as many things as well —  
"Your voice isn't loud enough —"  
"Hit'm harder —"  
"Jimmy will win —"  
"Damn capital letters —"  
"You don't have the head —"  
"You're about average —"  
"I'll show 'em. By God I'll show 'em!"

He had gone to bed, and with time and activity his bitterness of the moment had been forgotten.

In school, Jim had been introduced to Diane. Diane had been one of those girls that attract attention. People had said, "One of the real beauties!" A fair brunette, blue eyes, light skin, but dark, glossy hair.

Jim had been attracted to her from the first. But with Jim — well, he had always been shy, or bashful — but anyway, he had hit it off with Diane right from the start. She had seemed to pull him from within himself.

It had been at an exchange, and they had danced almost every dance together. When he had first asked her, she'd said that she wasn't too good, but Jim had finally persuaded her to dance the first slow one — and after that, they had had more fun than anyone else at the dance.

It was spring now — a muddy spring. But a warm spring; and blossoms; and buds; and grass.

And one night there had been a giant blast, a big drunken party. "They will remember this one for a long time," the boys had said afterward. "Yes sir, this here party is gonna be known as the granddaddy of all parties."

Jim had been shocked when he'd read the news article the next day. "Student Spree; Damage Estimated at Twenty-five Hundred." And in smaller letters: "Several Students Held on Various Charges."

One of those things which isn't really instigated. An

affair that just erupts. One that nobody realizes could happen until after it has happened.

Diane of course, being a girl looking the way she did and so on, was a very popular girl. So she wasn't at all tied down to Jim. She had been going with Al frequently.

A couple of days after the big night, Jim and Diane were sitting in a small cafe, sipping cokes. Diane had been unusually quiet. "Jim, why do some people have to do things like those boys did?" The question had startled Jim. He had been absorbed in his thoughts — and they were the same as Diane's.

"Why — I don't know. I was just wondering the same thing. Why?"

"Well..." Diane had sat up straight and looked across the table at Jim. "Al asked me to go with him Saturday night. And I told him I couldn't — that I probably wouldn't go with him anymore."

Jim's brows had met and his face worked into a frown. "But I thought you enjoyed going with Al." As much as he had hated to admit it to himself, Al had been good-looking, had a nice personality. A good date, he had heard a girl say. "Why didn't you go with him?"

Diane's blue eyes had opened wide. "Didn't you know — I mean — well, some of us girls were talking, and Sue said that Al was one of the boys in on the riot."

Jim had tried to hide his surprise. No, he hadn't heard. "Who did you say told you?" He had become interested.

"Sue just sorta mentioned it."

"Did she say who she heard it from?"

"...hu-uh. It was just sorta one of those things that get said."

Sure, Jim had known. One of those things that just slipped out before anybody thought. But one of the things which can hurt somebody.

"But Al couldn't have been one of the boys in the riot!" And Jim had said it. He would never have had to worry about what Al and Diane were doing as he sat in his room while they were together. He would never have had to fear that the other boy might take — and keep — Diane. But he had told her.

Her eyes grew even wider and bluer. "What do you mean, Jim?"

"Al was with me that night. A few of us guys went to the drive-in that night. We didn't know anything about it until the next morning."

"Jim — honest?" She had clasped his hand in both of hers.

"No kidding."

"You mean...?"

"Yeah, must just have been a rumor. Sue Davis is always blowing something like that around."

And Jim had thought that he'd never felt more unhappy in his life. It wouldn't make any difference now. Oh, she'd probably have found out that Al hadn't been one of the drunken rioters. But it might have been quite a while. Al might've lost interest in the meantime.

Diane had looked into Jim's eyes, her hands still clasping his, resting on the cool table top. "I'm glad you told me, Jim." And all of a sudden, Jim had been glad, too. She squeezed his hand and smiled.

—John Thomas, *Ag. So.*



## Poem

As a cobweb seemingly infinite end to end  
 Drifts aimlessly on a woodland breeze,  
 Time, since we met, has waved its flirting filament  
 Past the reach of four seasons (too elusive to seize).  
 Now as I enter the fields of another fall,  
 Like a soft silken whip it strikes my face,  
 And, looking back along the strand, I find it fastened —  
 That love has tied it down at this place.

—James Wickliff, *Chem. Grad.*

